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Scale How, Ambleside, UK, 2009

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CHATS WITH NURSE.

BY TWO MOTHERS.

II. CLEANLINESS AND WATER.

"WELL, Janet, have you digested all we talked about the other evening, on the subject of fresh air," said Mrs. Ernest, as she sat down by the nursery table to have another chat with her nurse.

"Mostly, ma'am; though I had to write down the words *oxygen* and *carbonic acid* many times before I could remember them. First, I could only think them, now I can say them quite comfortably. It is one thing to know these wonderful things, ma'am, quite another to do all one would wish. But I will do my best to remember what I ought to do, and look well after the children," said Janet.

"To-night we will talk about water and cleanliness, Janet. I will begin by telling you of the first thing I noticed on entering the nursery this afternoon, for it deprived the room of the feeling of cleanliness and cheerfulness it would otherwise have had. The bottom bar of the grate was choked with dead ashes and cinders."

"Why, ma'am, I had just tidied the hearth thoroughly, and taken great pains to make it look bright for this lesson hour."

"I can see that, Janet; but our wonderful oxygen is again wanted—even the very cinders cannot get on well without it. Oxygen, like other excellent things, cannot do good work when there is some hindrance in the way. On the free entrance of oxygen, through that lowest bar, depends the life of the fire, whether it flickers and burns miserably, or is bright, cheerful, and clear. The fire is then as dependent for its life on the oxygen, as is the health and life of our children.

A sufficiency of it gives them both a wholesome, cheerful, active life. So, Janet, take your poker, and probe well the bottom bar, to prove the effect of my words, and when you admit the air, you will at once see that what my books tell me is true: 'Oxygen is a gas, on which all life depends—it will not burn itself, but many substances will burn in it.'

"Well, really, who would have thought all that," chattered Janet, as she swept back the disturbed ashes. "I shall tell my mother, for she has always said that her clean fireside brought my father home, and his money too. I shall tell her that oxygen brought him home."

"We will talk now about the general cleanliness of the nursery," Mrs. Ernest said, "though it is now so well understood, since education has made such strides in England, that to be clean is to be healthy, or perhaps I should say that to be dirty is to be unhealthy, since the cleanest do not escape sickness, but the dirty are sooner or later attacked by disease. Indeed, dirt claims for its own, thousands of victims, especially young children, as the officers of some of our societies could tell us. As far as scrubbing and cleaning goes, Janet, you keep, or see to having the nursery beautifully kept, but I must warn you that often what you call dust, a doctor might call germs, and would bid us rid every corner of them. I have frequently found that servants neglect to beat furniture and beds for fear of 'rousing the dust.' What I want you to do, Janet, is to take care that the dust *is* roused, for the enemy discovered, can be hoisted and burnt, but lurking it is dangerous and detrimental to health. On the top of the press, in the table cover and rugs, and even amongst the toys and books, the dust hides, but only until the play hour, when it is shaken from its hold, to thicken the atmosphere, and enter our lungs. Bring forth every unclean atom, Janet, so that when our great friend the Sun streams in at the windows, he may find his work light. You know from our last lesson how germs float in the air, many of them very harmful, even deadly, that they are really alive, and must be killed. The sun is our friend; the germs our enemies, all the more subtle because we cannot see them with the naked eye, but they penetrate our body at various points, get into our blood, and either wound or destroy us. The sun brings us aid; he slaughters the germs freely; light they hate, it is

their death blow. So pull up the blind to the very top, give us and the children that most valuable medicine, a Sun Bath, and let the germs have a bad time of it. Speaking of sun, this would be a good time for me to remind you always to keep the children on the sunny side of the road, unless in very hot weather, when, of course, it is safer and more natural that you should seek the shade. I do so often meet groups of pale little children walking along on a very cold day, on the shady side of the road, when on the opposite side the air is quite warm and delicious. This is from want of thought, or the nurse does not make it a habit to observe where the sun shines. It is clearly then my duty, as a mother, to see that you form the habit of noticing each morning, as you start out with the little folk, where the sun touches at the time. The sun has a peculiar value in giving color to children, just as he is the giver of the lovely green to the leaves of the trees.

Next let me warn you against keeping the water standing, for the children to drink, without a cover over it. The safest way is to boil a kettle of our hard water every morning, and keep it for use during the day in a covered jug. Both milk and water have a peculiar attraction for our enemies the germs, so never leave any milk standing in the nursery cupboard which you mean to use again, for though pains have been taken to destroy the germs by boiling it, others will quickly find it out. Milk should be fetched, each time you require it, from a cool fresh atmosphere, where no active disturbance of dust is going on. Besides this, milk very soon begins to decompose in a warm or close air, a cupboard is the wrong place for it, and though not sour, a chemical change may have started, without our knowing it, and the child's health becomes disturbed who drinks it."

The sunny side of the way I always make for, ma'am. The old nurse, who trained me, was very particular about that, and about the milk also; she said the babies told, though they couldn't speak, when the milk had been neglected; they were fidgetty and cross, and restless in the night-time."

"Yes; Janet, be very careful over what seem *only trifles*. A great gate hangs on very small hinges. For instance: never allow the children to hang over the grids leading

to the drains going from the house.* A thorough nurse always attends to this very particularly. Although children cannot be kept entirely away from them, see that the time spent near them is as short as possible, for a mysterious cavity, of any sort, has a peculiar, and not always a wholesome, fascination for little prying minds. Sewer gas is stealthy and deadly, and although we do all in our power, now-a-days, to fight the unseen powers which it contains, they come upon us unawares, and are, to say the least, best kept at a safe distance. If we are not really ill, sometimes 'we are not quite well;' neither is it quite easy to decide what is sapping our energies and health, so beware of drains. To come now to the subject of baths and personal cleanliness. I know that you think it is unnecessary to bathe the children daily. When I tell you that your skin is supplied with millions of little channels or drain pipes, which can become choked with impurities from various sources, you will see the value of washing the openings of these little tubes free every day, from accumulations which may block them up."

"But I can see no pipes, ma'am, on *my* skin."

"They are there for all that, Nurse. You shall see them some day through Mr. Ernest's microscope, at present you must believe me. The waste that is thrown off from your body through these channels is known as perspiration, which, with other matters thrown off from the surface of the body, have an unpleasant odour. They pervade the bed clothes and nightclothes, so that you ought to hang up the latter during the day. Expose the former freely to the air for some time before making the bed."

"Well I feel like a walking bundle of drain pipes, ma'am," said Janet, "I feel as if I must go and bathe myself this minute."

"I am glad I have succeeded in making you feel uncomfortable, Janet. Ignorance may be blissful sometimes, but

* The grids or gratings, specially referred to, are those covering yard-gulleys, which ought always to be in connection with some *permanent* water-supply, and, should they not be so, ought to be periodically replenished with water, as otherwise during a period of prolonged drought, the water, constituting the "seal," in the traps connected with them will have evaporated, leaving the trap utterly inefficient—a name without a reality. Of course the caution in the text applies to gratings at the road sides as well, although near these the children are hardly so likely to linger.

it is not by most people considered wise—it is better to be forearmed, by being forewarned.”

“I could tell you many other wonders of the skin, but all I can do now is simply to teach you to see the importance of washing the body well, all over. Only one thing more I will tell you. One place where dust comes from is off your skin, which is constantly shaking off its very outer layer like scales. You will have noticed the sheets, and your undergarments giving off dust, on being shaken. That dust is really your skin, once your living body, now dead and flying from you, a million little corpses.”

“Ugh!” said Nurse in awe this time. “So I am carrying dead things about on me. I begin to feel quite creepy. I don’t quite like knowing it, ma’am, and yet clean I am from this day forth, so I suppose all you have told me, has done what you wished it to do, ma’am. Is it to rub off the dead scales that Jane is to dry the children ‘into a glow,’ ma’am?”

“The glow is the blood rushing to the surface of the skin, making it firm and healthy. Don’t you remember I told you last week, that where the blood is demanded by action, there it goes and nourishes. Then why should we neglect to demand it for the skin any more than we should for the children’s muscles; for what is so beautiful as a beautiful skin, and if the skin is not acting, the whole system is thrown into disorder. Pay a little more attention to your towel Janet, and soon you will cease to be troubled with the spots you worry about on your bright face. Give the little pores a chance to part with their impurities, and they will also take in a little oxygen to keep the surface blood bright.

“I’m beginning to feel clean again, as you talk on, ma’am; and not a crevice of the children shall remain neglected,” said Janet, becoming enthusiastic.

“Beware, however,” said her mistress, “of poking with a towel, or anything whatever, into their ears, nurse. The drum of the ear is very thin,—only as thick as tissue paper,—and the wax has been provided to prevent the dirt from intruding too far. Dry carefully without poking into the ears, as deafness is sometimes the result of neglect in this respect. I must tell you one true tale which will show you the importance of keeping the pores of the skin open. At a great festival in Rome, one mother determined to send her

little boy in the procession as a golden angel. He was carefully covered entirely over with gold paint, so that every pore was closed. The procession had only been half-an-hour in the street, when the dear little angel fell to the ground, quite dead. The number of sweat glands varies in different people, but has been estimated at, in round numbers, 2,300,000, or, what will, perhaps, appeal to you more forcibly, because more familiarly, the total length of the sweat-ducts or channels, in an average adult, has been estimated at 28 miles. Now you can imagine how important they are. The perspiration or moisture that escapes is oily, so that is why we must use plenty of soap, as water will not affect oil. I should like to show you, now, why great attention must be paid to the brushing of the children’s hair, and to the cleanliness of their nails. The hair is really the horny covering of the skin, which has grown to a thread-like form. You would be wearied if I explained exactly what hair is, and how it grows. You now understand that oil and moisture ooze out of the pores of the skin. This same process goes on in the head, and you can understand how necessary it is to keep the head clean, and also the hair, so that it may grow well, and look rich and glossy, and not matted and poor. Combing is even better than brushing, and each child ought to have its hair combed and brushed twenty minutes each day, at least. With regard to the nails, never scoop any dirt out, but always wash it away with soap and water and a brush. Very often the germs of disease can get into the nails, and by remaining there, get through the skin of the finger and so affect the whole system. In my nursery days we had every morning before breakfast nail parade before our nurse. We marched past her, holding up both hands, so that she could see if they were properly cleaned. If the hair and nails are kept in good order, there will be less risk of infection.”

“I never dreamt when I went into service that I had so many responsibilities. Do we brush our teeth to keep out illnesses, too?”

“Ah! I am glad you have mentioned the teeth. I was just coming to them. If teeth are not cleaned daily they get covered with tartar, which not only causes the gums to ulcerate, but decays the teeth, and the breath smells unpleasantly. If our teeth are not strong and good we cannot

masticate our food, and so our digestion gets out of order. I should like you to see that the children clean their teeth *both night and morning*. Charcoal or chalk are safe powders; but the principal point to remember is, that they brush up and down—backwards and forwards, so that the brush removes any particle of food that may have settled there. Now I have finished my chat to-night, Janet. I have heard you say sometimes 'Cleanliness is next to Godliness,' and very truly so, for discomfort and bad temper are bred of dirt, and no one can do the good he would, if cross or unwell, and so life's pathway grows crooked and ugly, and becomes a failure. It is difficult to imagine clean hearts and lives, unconnected with clean homes and bodies. Good night, Janet; we will next talk about 'Nursery Accidents.'

"Good night, ma'am, and thank you."

[If any nurse does not quite understand these papers, or would like to ask any questions, "the Mothers" would be very glad to answer any letter addressed to "Mrs. Ernest," House of Education, Ambleside.]

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

BY MARY CROSSTHWAITE.

LAST October, when visiting a well-known Ragged School in one of the poorest parts of London, we were surprised to find the place in the hands of workmen: windows being put in here and fresh passages and doors there. On enquiring the reason, (for not very long ago the premises had been largely re-built and re-modelled on modern lines,) the venerable Superintendent replied:—"You see the Government is down upon us; it says that, with so many children we must have so much more fresh air, and that our exits are not good enough in case of fire, etc." Laughingly we questioned:—"However did you all manage twenty years ago—when we first knew you in that large gloomy school-room, (transformed from a brewery,) with its crowds of dirty ragged little urchins?" "Well!" he responded, "I suppose the times are changed."

"Certainly they are," we thought, as we entered the infants' class-room and saw the delightful Hand and Eye training in the Kindergarten; dainty coloured flowers and pictures, and bead curtains, etc., etc., being worked by the tiny fingers of little ones, whose "home," is the common lodging house.

"The Government Inspector insists upon all this kind of work being done," we were told.

In another room, noticing the upright "Vertical" writing in the elder children's copy books, the same reason was given; and when we commented upon the spotlessness of the leaves, free from blots, and smears, and finger marks, and asked how in the world this was accomplished, a Ragged School Teacher acknowledged the great difficulty, but added—"We just send the children over and over again to wash their hands, and insist upon this cleanliness of work and person." Would that some home school-rooms could have the same discipline enforced, so that no slurred or blemished work should be tolerated!